DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 216 914 SE 038 118

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TITLE What Happens When Continents Collide? Crustal Evaluation Education Project. Teacher's Guide [and] Student Investigation.
INSTITUTION National Association of Geology Teachers.
SPONS AGENCY National Science Foundation, Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO CEEP-MOD-NY3-6-2; ISBN-0-89873-058-9; ISBN-0-89873-059-7
PUB DATE 79
GRANT SED-75-20151; SED-77-08539; SED-78-25104
NOTE 15p.
AVAILABLE FROM Ward's Natural Science Establishment, Inc., P.O. Box 1712, Rochester, NY 14603 (or P.O. Box 1749, Monterey, CA 93940.)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Earth Science; *Geology; Instructional Materials; Oceanography; *Science Activities; *Science Course Improvement Projects; Science Curriculum; Science Education; Science Instruction; Secondary Education; *Secondary School Science; Teaching Guides; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Crustal Evolution Education Project; National Science Foundation; *Plate Tectonics

ABSTRACT

Crustal Evolution Education Project (CEEP) modules were designed to: (1) provide students with the methods and results of continuing investigations into the composition, history, and processes of the earth's crust and the application of this knowledge to man's activities and (2) to be used by teachers with little or no previous background in the modern theories of sea-floor spreading, continental drift, and plate tectonics. Each module consists of two booklets: a teacher's guide and student investigation. The teacher's guide contains all of the information present in the student investigation booklet as well as: (1) a general introduction; (2) prerequisite student background; (3) objectives; (4) list of required materials; (5) background information; (6) suggested approach; (7) procedure, including number of 45-minute class periods required; (8) summary questions (with answers); (9) extension activities; and (10) list of references. Two class periods are suggested to complete the activity in this module in which students sketch a labeled cross-section showing stages in the collision of two plates containing continental masses, identify a mountain range resulting from continental collision, identify lithospheric plates on which continents are colliding, and list three kinds of evidence that some modern continental masses are in collision. (Author/JN)

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CRUSTAL
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What Happens When Continents Collide?

What Happens When Continents Collide?

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Catalog No. 34W1030

For use with Student Investigation 34W1130
Class time: two 45-minute periods

Developed by
THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF GEOLOGY TEACHERS

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Ward's Natural Science Establishment, Inc. Rochester, NY • Monterey, CA

NAGT Crustal Evolution Education Project

Edward C. Stoever, Jr., Project Director

Welcome to the exciting world of current research into the composition, history and processes of the earth's crust and the application of this knowledge to man's activities. The earth sciences are currently experiencing a dramatic revolution in our understanding of the way in which the earth works. CEEP modules are designed to bring into the classroom the methods and results of these continuing investigations. The Crustal Evolution Education Project began work in 1974 under the auspices of the National Association of Geology Teachers. CEEP materials have been developed by teams of science educators, classroom teachers, and scientists. Prior to publication, the materials were field tested by more than 200 teachers and over 12,000 students.

Current crustal evolution research is a breaking story that students are living through today. Teachers and students alike have a unique opportunity through CEEP modules to share in the unfolding of these educationally important and exciting advances. CEEP modules are designed to provide students with appealing firsthand investigative experiences with concepts which are at or close to the frontiers of scientific inquiry into plate tectonics. Furthermore, the CEEP modules are designed to be used by teachers with little or no previous background in the modern theories of sea-floor spreading, continental drift and plate tectonics.

We know that you will enjoy using CEEP modules in your classroom. Read on, and be prepared to experience a renewed enthusiasm for teaching as you learn more about the living earth in this and other CEEP modules.

About CEEP Modules...

Most CEEP modules consist of two booklets: a Teacher's Guide and a Student Investigation. The Teacher's Guide contains all the information and illustrations in the Student Investigation, plus sections printed in color, intended only for the teacher, as well as answers to the questions that are included in the Student Investigation. In some modules, there are illustrations that appear only in the Teacher's Guide, and these are designated by figure letters instead of the number sequence used in the Student Investigation.

For some modules, maps, rulers and other common classroom materials are needed, and in varying quantities according to the method of presentation. Read over the module before scheduling its use in class and refer to the list of MATERIALS in the module.

Each module is individual and self-contained in content, but some are divided into two or more parts for convenience. The recommended length of time for each module is indicated. Some modules require prerequisite knowledge of some aspects of basic earth science; this is noted in the Teacher's Guide.

The material was-prepared with the support of National Science Foundation Grant Nos. SED 75-20151, SED 77-08539, and SED 78-25104. However, any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of NSF.

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What Happens When Continents Collide?

INTRODUCTION

The theory of plate tectonics states that earth's crustal plates have always been in motion. Plates that are separating from each other allow lava to well up from the mantle to rise to the ocean floor. As the lava cools, new ocean crust forms at the mid-ocean mountain range to fill the gap left by the separating plates (See Figure 1.) Where plates are moving toward each other, there is a problem—the ocean lithosphere must be destroyed. This happens when the ocean lithosphere of one plate sinks downward under the opposing plate. This downward motion of a plate is called subduction. An ocean trench marks the place where one plate is subducting under another. (See Figure 2.)

However, if the subducting plate is carrying a part of a continent, the situation becomes more complex. Continental crust has a lower density than ocean crust. Scientists think that because of the density difference between the two types of crust, the continental crust cannot be subducted. Near the border of the continent are abyssal plain and continental margin sediments. These, too, have low density. How will the sediments and continental rocks on one plate behave as they are drawn together with continental rocks of another plate? Has this happened in the past? Is it happening today?

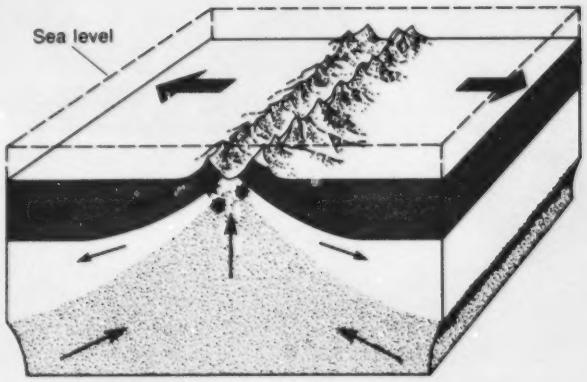

Figure 1. Magma rises into mid-ocean ridge. At the same time, plates move apart from each

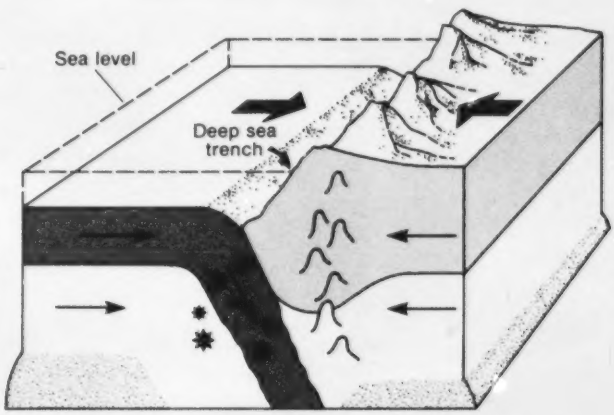

Figure 2. One crustal plate subducting under another.

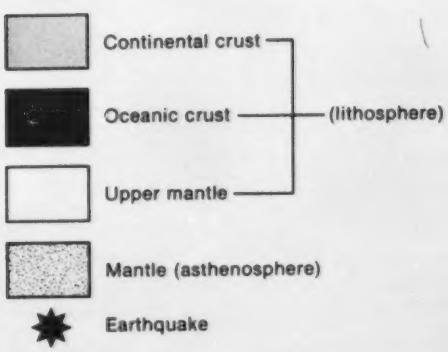

Illustration key

PREREQUISITE STUDENT BACKGROUND

Students should have some knowledge of plate tectonic theory. They should know about faulting and folding mechanisms and where earthquakes occur because of such motions. They should also know the topographic zones of the ocean basins, such as the abyssal plains and the continental margin (continental shelf, slope, and rise). They should know that a thick blanket of land-derived sediments covers the continental margin. Land-derived sediments are interlayered with ocean sediments in abyssal plains.

Students should know that ocean crustal rocks are basaltic in composition, while continental crustal rocks are close to granite in average composition. They should know that basaltic rock has a higher density (gm/cm^3) than granitic rock.

In addition, students should have a general understanding of the lines of evidence, such as fossils, rocks and age, that allow scientists to infer that the supercontinents Pangaea, Gondwanaland and Laurasia existed in the past. Such knowledge might come from their previous exposure to other CEEP modules or through reading general articles on crustal evolution in *Scientific American.*

OBJECTIVES

After you have completed this activity, you should be able to:

1. Sketch a labeled cross-section showing stages in the collision of two plates containing continental masses.
2. Identify at least one mountain range that has resulted from collision of continents.
3. Identify lithospheric plates on which continents are colliding.
4. List at least three kinds of evidence that some modern continental masses are in collision.

MATERIALS

Physiographic map of the ocean floor, such as *The Physical World,* National Geographic Society. Educational Services, Department 79, Washington, D.C. 20036—one for each group of five students.

A continental collision device must be made for each team of two students. The devices can be reused for succeeding classes.

Materials needed for each device:

2 standard paper napkins, one preferably of green or other dark color, and one white, both cut to about 7 cm width.

1 piece of corrugated cardboard cut to about standard page size (21 x 28 cm).

30 cm masking tape

2 pieces of wood furring strip, each cut to approximately 7 cm length. Furring strip is approximately 3.7 cm wide by 1.8 cm thick (¾" x 1½" in lumber stores) and is sold in approximately 2.5 m lengths.

4 large bobby pins (hair-setting pins)

1 strip of paper, approximately 7 cm wide and at least 28 cm long. (Three strips of paper can be cut from pages of a standard size writing tablet or three-hole notebook filler paper. Adding machine tape also can be used. Adjust all widths, mentioned above, to the width of the adding machine tape if this is used.)

To construct the device, tape one block of furring strip in the middle and near one end of the corrugated cardboard. Make sure the long edge of the block is parallel to the end of the cardboard. Use a sharp knife to cut a slit in the cardboard at the edge of the block that faces the large area of cardboard. Run the knife blade back and forth several times to widen the slit so that the paper strip will slide through with ease. Refer to Figure 3 to set up the second block of furring strip and strips of napkin on the paper strip. Bobby pins should each be 4 cm apart on the paper strip.

Students could easily make the paper strip and its attached components and perform the activity within one laboratory period. In this case, paper strip, napkin strips, tape, furring strip blocks and bobby pins should be preassembled for student use.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Eurasian Plate was formed by the collision of separate European and Asian plates. The Ural Mountains are the result of this collision about 250 million years ago. India was once part of the southern supercontinent called Gondwanaland. When Gondwanaland split apart, India began a counterclockwise rotation and northward migration. The collision of the Indian and Eurasian plates began about 40 to 60 million years ago. It has caused fold mountain formations and thickening of the continental crust in the area stretching from Afghanistan to southeastern China. Recent earthquakes in the Himalayan mountain region and to the north show that the collision process is still active. However, the earthquake pattern is possibly not related exclusively to the collision process. Research on this aspect of plate tectonics is continuing.

SUGGESTED APPROACH

Students can perform this activity individually if provided with a pre-assembled continental collision device. Alternatively, two students could easily assemble the paper strip of the continental collision device and do the activity in one lab period. In this case, for safety reasons, provide students with cardboard in which the subduction slit has already been cut and widened. Students can tape the stationary block of furring strip to the cardboard base.

If more than one class is to use the device, then ask each student or team to carefully disassemble the device when finished with it.

PROCEDURE

In this activity students learn to simulate the collision of continental lithosphere resulting from plate motions.

Key words: none

Time required: two 45-minute periods

Material: one continental collision device

1. Figure 3 shows the continental collision device. On Figure 3 label the wooden furring strips "continental crust." Label the slit "marginal trench." Label the paper strip "oceanic crust and lithosphere." Label the colored napkin "oceanic sediments" and the white napkin "continental margin sediments."

2. Use one hand to grasp the end of the strip of paper that extends through the slit in the cardboard of the continental collision device. Slowly pull the strip of paper downward. Try to pull evenly so the paper strip doesn't shift from side to side. Stop pulling when the moving block has traveled as far as it will go.

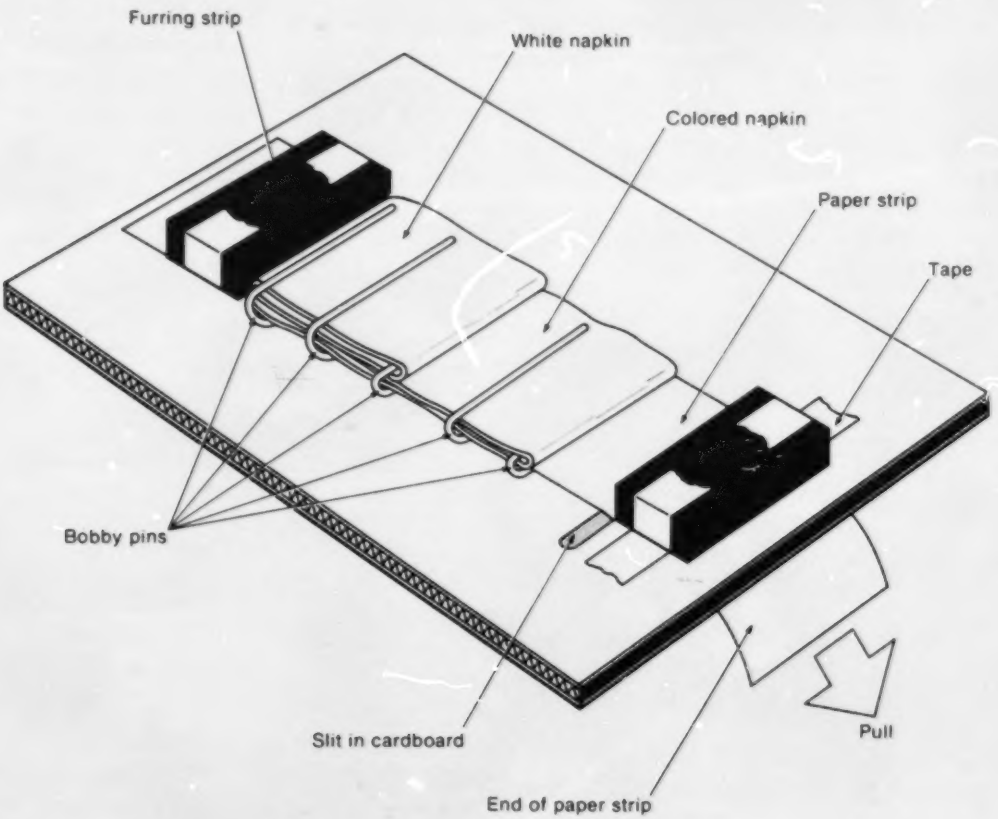

Figure 3. Continental collision device ready for use.

In the space below, write sentences that tell what happened to the simulated ocean sediments and continental margin sediments.

At first, the ocean sediments moved toward the stationary continent without being disturbed. Then, the sediments hit against the stationary continent and began to form into fold mountains. After that, the continental margin sediments began to form into fold mountains.

In the space below, sketch a cross-section of the model to show the final arrangement of continental blocks and sediments. Label the type of mountains formed by the motion of simulated sediments between the two continental blocks. On your diagram make asterisks (*) to show where earthquakes might occur during a combined subduction and collision process on the real earth.

Student sketches will not be as detailed as example shown below, but the crumpled condition of the napkins should be apparent in their diagrams.

3. In the space below, tell what might happen if the simulated continental blocks were made of clay instead of wood.

The blocks would also change shape through folding and faulting because of the collision.

4. Study the topography of the Indian Plate and adjacent countries of the Eurasian Plate on the physical map of the ocean floor. In the space below, describe how the topography of that area is similar to that simulated on your continental collision device.

The Indian landmass is relatively flat except for the northern region. There, the Himalaya Mountains have been formed by the collision of India with Asia.

5. Pull the moving block and paper strip back to their original positions. Slide the bobby pins along the paper strip to return the napkins to their original positions.

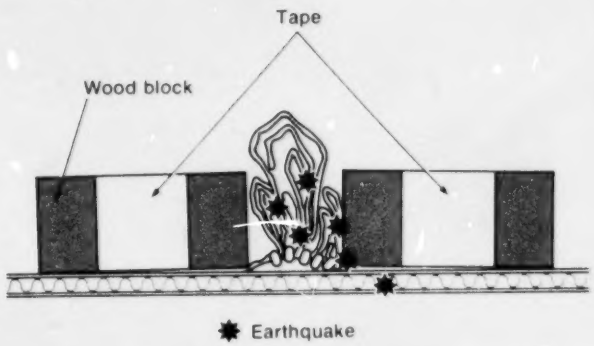

Figure A. Side view of continental collision device after pulling strip of paper.

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

1. How does the theory of plate tectonics explain continental collisions?

When a lithospheric plate carrying a continent is subducted under another plate with a continent near its edge, then the two continents may eventually collide.

2. What happens to ocean and continental margin sediments lying between the moving continental blocks?

Such sediments are compressed to form fold mountains. (Faults usually occur also, but they cannot be simulated by the continental collision device.)

3. Based on results from the continental collision simulation, describe three kinds of evidence that might prove two continental masses were moving together:

a. earthquakes (where?)—

Along the borders of the two continents and along the subducting oceanic lithosphere.

b. sedimentary rocks (where in relation to continental masses? What kind?)—

Folded sedimentary rocks between the two continental masses should show evidence of ocean sediments and continental margin sediments.

c. kind of topography—

Fold mountains.

EXTENSION

Refer to a diagram that shows how the continents were joined to form the supercontinent Pangaea. Now study the physiographic diagram of the ocean floor to see where mountains might have formed when these continents first came together to form Pangaea. List the names of these mountains.

Students will discover that such mountain ranges as the Atlas of North Africa, the Alps of southern Europe and the Appalachians of the eastern United States are the results of early continental collisions.

REFERENCES

Matthews, S.W., 1973, This changing earth. *National Geographic*, v. 143, no. 1 (Jan.), p. 1–37.

Molnar, P. and Tapponier, P., 1977, The collision between India and Eurasia. *Scientific American*, v. 236, no. 4 (Apr.), p. 30–41.

NAGT Crustal Evolution Education Project Modules

CEEP Modules are listed here in alphabetical order. Each Module is designed for use in the number of class periods indicated. For suggested sequences of CEEP Modules to cover specific topics and for correlation of CEEP Modules to standard earth science textbooks, consult Ward's descriptive literature on CEEP. The Catalog Numbers shown here refer to the CLASS PACK of each Module consisting of a Teacher's Guide and 30 copies of the Student Investigation. See Ward's descriptive literature for alternate order quantities.

CEEP Module	Class Periods	CLASS PACK Catalog No.
• A Sea-floor Mystery: Mapping Polarity Reversals	3	34 W 1201
• Continents And Ocean Basins: Floaters And Sinkers	3-5	34 W 1202
• Crustal Movement: A Major Force In Evolution	2-3	34 W 1203
• Deep Sea Trenches And Radioactive Waste	1	34 W 1204
• Drifting Continents And Magnetic Fields	3	34 W 1205
• Drifting Continents And Wandering Poles	4	34 W 1206
• Earthquakes And Plate Boundaries	2	34 W 1207
• Fossils As Clues To Ancient Continents	2-3	34 W 1208
• Hot Spots In The Earth's Crust	3	34 W 1209
• How Do Continents Split Apart?	2	34 W 1210
• How Do Scientists Decide Which Is The Better Theory?	2	34 W 1211
• How Does Heat Flow Vary In The Ocean Floor?	2	34 W 1212
• How Fast Is The Ocean Floor Moving?	2-3	34 W 1213
• Iceland: The Case Of The Splitting Personality	3	34 W 1214
• Imaginary Continents: A Geological Puzzle	2	34 W 1215
• Introduction To Lithospheric Plate Boundaries	1-2	34 W 1216
• Lithospheric Plates And Ocean Basin Topography	2	34 W 1217
• Locating Active Plate Boundaries By Earthquake Data	2-3	34 W 1218
• Measuring Continental Drift: The Laser Ranging Experiment	2	34 W 1219
• Microfossils, Sediments And Sea-floor Spreading	4	34 W 1220
• Movement Of The Pacific Ocean Floor	2	34 W 1221
• Plate Boundaries And Earthquake Predictions	2	34 W 1222
• Plotting The Shape Of The Ocean Floor	2-3	34 W 1223
• Quake Estate (board game)	3	34 W 1224
• Spreading Sea Floors And Fractured Ridges	2	34 W 1225
• The Rise And Fall Of The Bering Land Bridge	2	34 W 1227
• Tropics In Antarctica?	2	34 W 1228
• Volcanoes: Where And Why?	2	34 W 1229
• What Happens When Continents Collide?	2	34 W 1230
• When A Piece Of A Continent Breaks Off	2	34 W 1231
• Which Way Is North?	3	34 W 1232
• Why Does Sea Level Change?	2-3	34 W 1233

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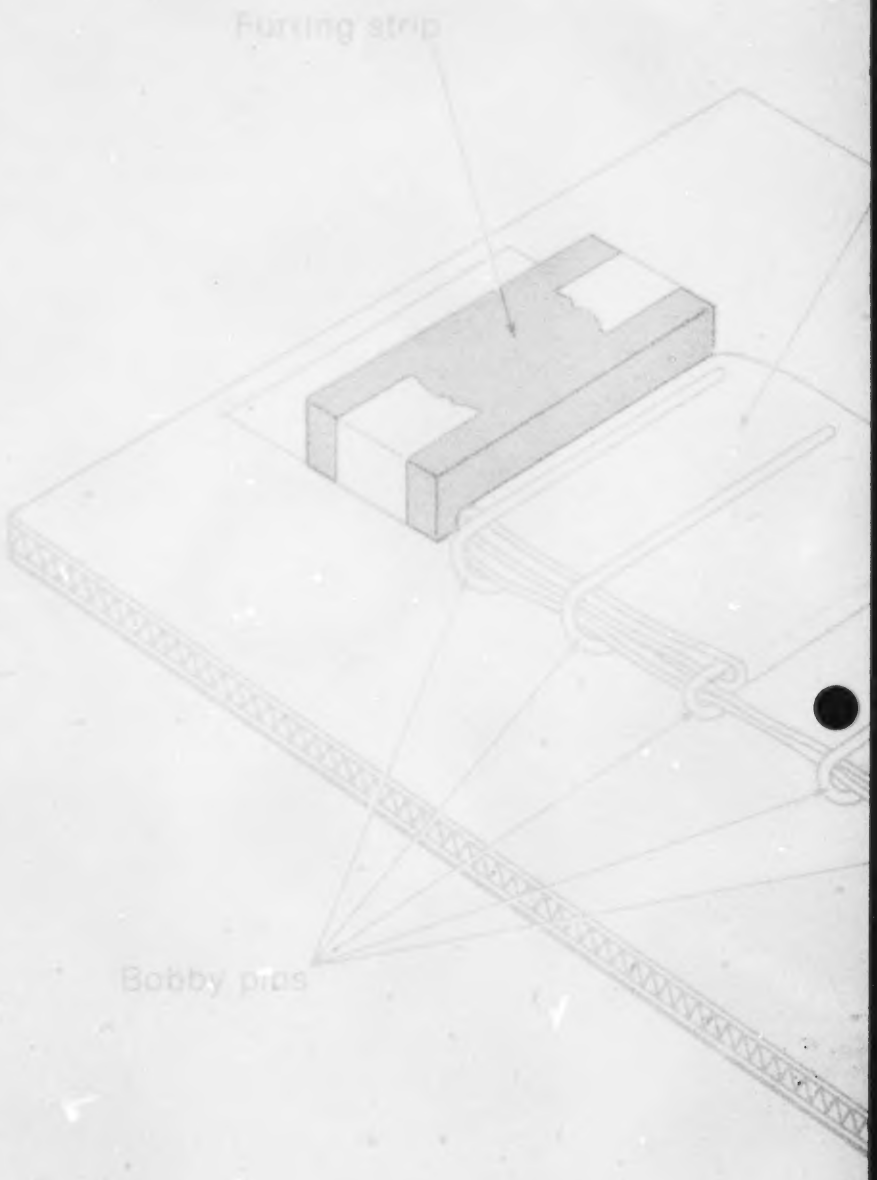

WARD'S

Ward's Natural Science Establishment, Inc.
P.O. Box 1712, Rochester, New York 14603 • P.O. Box 1749, Monterey, California 93940

CEEP MODULE NO. NY3 6-3
ISBN: 0-89673-068-9

Printed in U.S.A.

CRUSTAL EVOLUTION EDUCATION PROJECT

NAME DATE

Student Investigation

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What Happens When Continents Collide?

INTRODUCTION

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However, if the subducting plate is carrying a part of a continent, the situation becomes more complex. Continental crust has a lower density than ocean crust. Scientists think that because of the density difference between the two types of crust, the continental crust cannot be subducted. Near the border of the continent are abyssal plain and continental margin sediments. These, too, have low density. How will the sediments and continental rocks on one plate behave as they are drawn together with continental rocks of another plate? Has this happened in the past? Is it happening today?

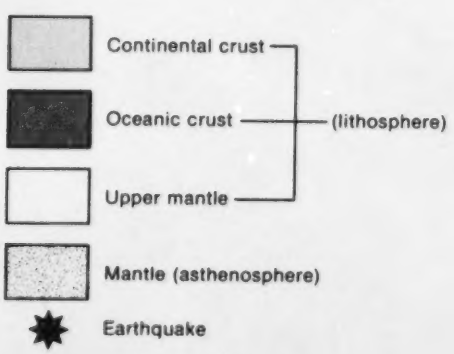

Illustration key

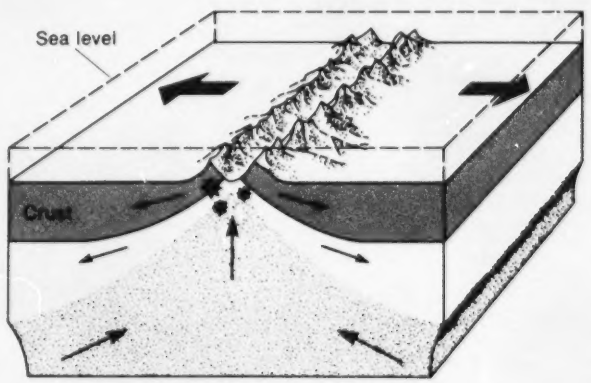

Figure 1. Magma rises upward into mid-ocean ridge. Plates move apart from each other.

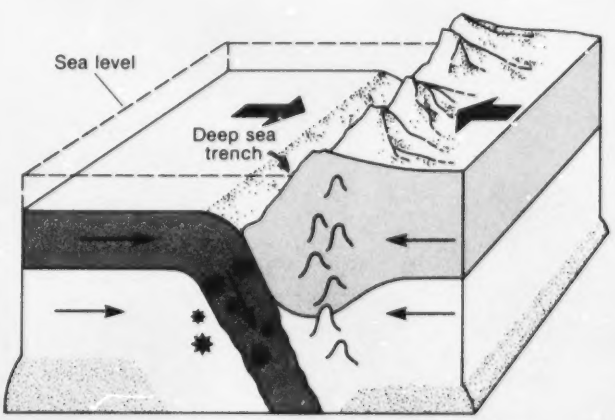

Figure 2. One crustal plate subducting under another.

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OBJECTIVES

After you have completed this activity, you should be able to:

1. Sketch a labeled cross-section showing stages in the collision of two plates containing continental masses.
2. Identify at least one mountain range that has resulted from collision of continents.
3. Identify lithospheric plates on which continents are colliding.
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PROCEDURE

Material: one continental collision device

1. Figure 3 shows the continental collision device. On Figure 3 label the wooden furring strips "continental crust." Label the slit "marginal trench." Label the paper strip "oceanic crust and lithosphere." Label the colored napkin "oceanic sediments" and the white napkin "continental margin sediments."

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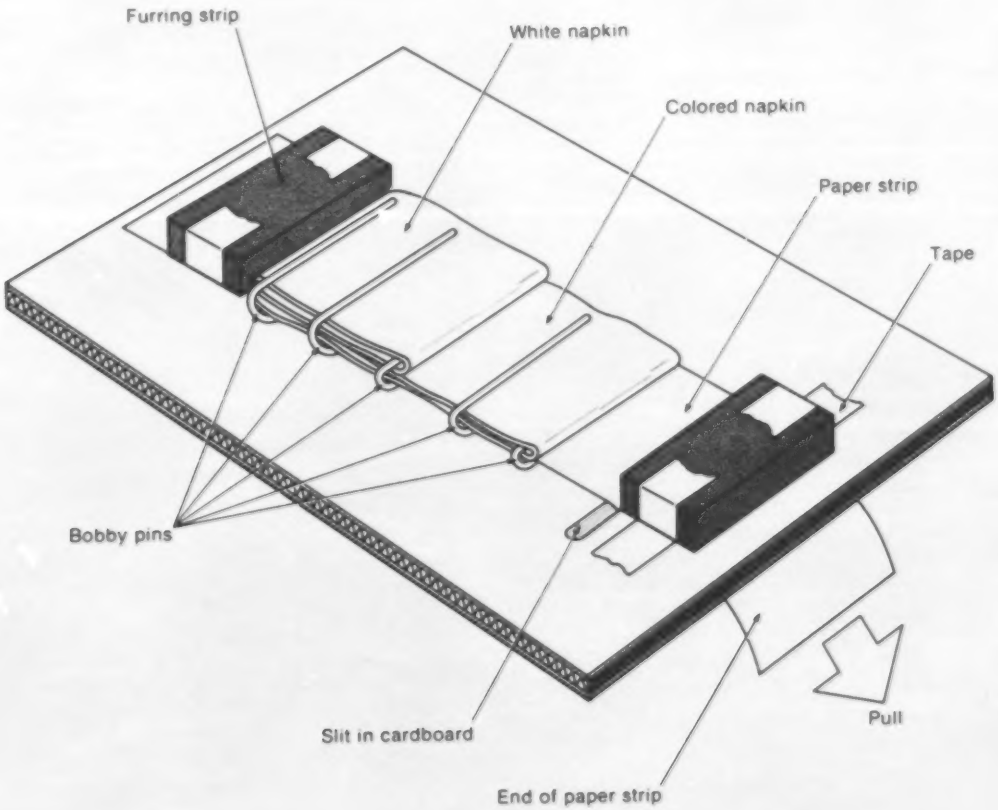

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c. kind of topography—

EXTENSION

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REFERENCE

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